



Christmas in Italy



Christmas is a religious holiday in Italy. The Christmas season in Italy starts on December 8, which is the Feast of the Immaculate Conception. This is the day that Christmas decorations go up. Many families decorate a tree and set up a presepe, or nativity scene. Cities and towns put up lights through the streets.



December 13 is Saint Lucy's Day. People in southern Italy celebrate by eating food made from cooked wheat, which is called *cuccia*.



On Christmas Eve, most Italians attend church. The Pope celebrates a special service at midnight in Rome. Many Italian people will not eat meat on Christmas Eve. Instead, they eat seven dishes of fish in a dinner called the Feast of the Seven Fishes. Eel, cod, and shrimp are popular dishes. For dessert, they eat sweet breads, such as a *panforte* or *panettone*.



St. Stephen's Day is December 26. It is also a holiday in Italy.



Children receive presents during the Christmas season. In some areas of Italy, Babbo Natale, or Santa Claus, delivers gifts to good children. In other places, the Baby Jesus brings gifts. There are also presents for children after Christmas. La Belfana is a good witch who flies around on a broomstick on the night of January 5. She brings toys and sweets to good children and charcoal or ashes to bad ones. The Three Wise Men bring gifts, like oranges and chocolate, in other places.



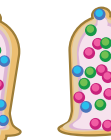
Panettone, a sweet Italian bread with raisins



On Epiphany, January 6, the Christmas season in Italy ends. Some places celebrate with a large bonfire. Some believe the sparks from the fire will tell about the future year.



a statue of la Belfana, the good witch who brings presents to children





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Vocabulary Match



Match the words to what they mean by writing the letter in the blank.



_____cuccia

A. large, outdoor fire



_____bonfire

B. cooked wheat



_____panettone

C. sweet bread with raisins



_____Feast of the Seven Fishes

D. nativity scene



_____presepe

E. Christmas Eve dinner of fish



In the space below, draw a picture of someone who brings gifts to children: Babbo Natale, Baby Jesus, la Belfana or the Three Wise Men.

